



Personality Ronella

Ronella Tjin Asjoe-Croes, CEO at Aruba Tourism Authority, is without a doubt three times a lady. The Lady of Tourism shines with her presence, her dealings and her professionalism. Who is this lady? What drives her? These questions sparked the curiosity of writer Linda. "This is about you and not what you do."

How was Ronella as a little girl? "As a child I was very shy. Being the first child - I have one sister and one brother-, I do get this sense that my parents were extra careful. I must say that they invested a lot, not only through care and love, attention and education, but also through curriculum activities. So I had ballet classes since I was 4 years old as well as swimming classes, tennis, scouting, piano classes and artistic gymnastics. Every day I had probably two or three extracurricular activities." She had a very active childhood and her favorite hobbies always turned out to be the ones that kept her going after her goals. In addition, there were the social activities with her family. "My family is rather big. Uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces ... It was always about family as well. Every Sunday we came together and there was this special family touch that marks my childhood memories. Yes, I had a very happy childhood."

The reason she is the successful professional woman today is her upbringing where her parents played a key role. Her mom, being a teacher for 35 years, invested a great deal of time in Ronella. Her

dad, who used to work for the Government, was also involved in business. "He was always into business and at the age of 12, 13 years I did some work for him to earn my own pocket money that resulted in a happy ride to the Benetton", Ronella jokes. "What I think is very important is the determination this brought me to do my own business in the future." As a little girl in pj's, walking around the house, Ronella saw her dad frequently showing his clients their house and its art for them to admire. "One of the businesses my dad owned was a restaurant, adjacent to the house where I lived as a child. Paradise Restaurant, it was called. I remember I used to distribute flyers on the beaches and I had to say: Welcome to paradise! I often times got a dollar or two as tip and that was great." Her dad was also co-owner of the Tattoo Party Boat. "So there is another touch with tourism. Besides of these possibilities to work with my dad's company and get in touch with tourists, there was always the realization that tourism is very important for Aruba and the Caribbean as a whole."

What do you do to relax? She laughs. "First of all I have to say that what I learned about myself is that I am probably hooked on being busy. I can't stand still." No matter the circumstances, Ronella needs to squeeze in some activity, which is why she starts her day going for a run or exercising in the gym. "I stick to that religiously, it clears my mind. It is part of my balance." But of course, there is also the social relaxation, which means she has her Friday Happy Hour with her husband and or friends. "My work comes with

a lot of social things, which is not always easy. It can be a lot, sometimes every evening. But it is part of the job and people expect you to be there. It does not bother me, on the contrary, I value that people take the opportunity to give you their thoughts, even in public, and share something with you." She states that maybe people think she is not approachable all the time, but she really is. "My personal feeling is that once they talk to me, they experience that I am very accessible." Stress is quite unfamiliar to her. "Key and critical situations trigger me."

Vietnam is the country Ronella would love to go to on vacation. This heavenly, culturally infused country would broaden her perspective on life. "There should be downtime as well, so my initial comment on doing nothing is also applicable. I am not really disciplined in taking vacations. I haven't done it for years. And that is a point I have to improve." Nowadays, she tries to experience the other side of the places she visits for work. "It is a business trip, meaning hotels and meetings, but I try to add a little flavor by doing something else."

If she had to choose a celebrity as a travel partner, Ronella would get into the plane with Anne Hathaway. It did not even take her a second to name the actress. "Because I think I can relate to her. I always respect the fact that she has been able to carry herself, the way she does it, the roles that she plays and the fact that she is young." Another person that can hop on Ronella's travel bus is the



prime minister of Canada. He is a man she would love to have a moment with to exchange thoughts. "He is doing so many things that are different and that intrigues me. If you want to be a leader, you cannot do the same things all the time and you need to take risks. Margaret Thatcher is a person whom I think did great things as well, in her time. Not all popular, but as a female leader—which is already impressive on itself for that time—and the decisions she has made, considering the point where the world was at that time, to me is pretty amazing."

The fact that she is a female leader in tourism is not an important issue to Ronella. It is rather the young age at which she started that she considers a blessing. "I am doing this job for 12 years already, 6 years in Bonaire and 6 years in Aruba. When I started my job as Director of Tourism in Bonaire, I was 27 years old. So to me it was very fortunate that I was presented with that opportunity, one which I decided to take." She is convinced one needs to grab the opportunities when they present themselves, as they happen for a reason. "I was a junior that was sitting at the table with experienced people. How am I going to gain their trust I asked myself? So I was like: I have to book results and fast. I am here to change things. Fortunately that is what happened." Ronella gradually booked results, which led to respect and trust in her capabilities

despite of being young. "I mean, yeah, there are a lot of men at the table, but that does not bother me much. Plus nowadays in the international world of tourism you see a lot of young professionals in key positions, so it is not exactly lots of senior men at the table anymore." Nevertheless as it pertains to female leaders in the industry, on island ... the great majority of Hotel GM's are male for instance. Yes you can feel left out sometimes and it does require a different approach. It is a pleasure though to work with them, not an issue at all. I still believe there should be more women. In Aruba, as compared to other Caribbean destinations, you do see more and more young professionals and women at the top." With the ongoing globalization, it is her opinion that nowadays people are more open-minded to the fact that women can be at the top, especially if you present yourself in a strong manner. "You have to believe in yourself, be self-confident."

Home- Heart- Love

While our eyes shift to the beautiful panorama of Tierra del Sol, I ask her what Aruba means to her. "Home, heart and love. This is me. Professionally I could never sell something I do not believe in. You have to have your heart in it. Aruba is also family, my support system, without my family who support me unconditionally, I would not be where I am today."

up-front with Writer Linda

